

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAN JO 01279 202247Z
ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 0558
AMEMBASSY PANAMA NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 1279

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PN, CS
SUBJECT: ODUBER AND SENATE REACTION ON PANAMA CANAL NEUTRALITY
TREATY

REF: STATE 069647

1. UNEXPECTEDLY, PRESIDENT OUDBER DID RETURN TO HIS OFFICE MARCH 20, P.M., IN PART BECAUSE OF HIS CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE PANAMANIAN REACTION TO THE DECONCINI RESERVATION. HE RECEIVED ME WITH THE NEWS THAT HE WAS AWAITING A CALL FROM PANAMA AND MIGHT WELL GO TO VISIT TORRIJOS ON MARCH 21. AFTER HE, LOPEZ MICHELSEN, PEREZ AND TORRIJOS HAD BEEN IN TOUCH BY PHONE, IT WAS THOUGHT USEFUL THAT TORRIJOS BE ENCOURAGED BY THEM PERSONALLY TO AVOID ANY PUBLIC COMMENT BY HIM OR ASSOCIATES BEFORE ACTION ON THE SECOND TREATY IS TAKEN BY THE U.S. SENATE. DECIDING THAT A MEETING OF PRESIDENTS COULD ONLY LEAD TO PRESS ATTENTION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF UNFORTUNATE COMMENT OR INTERPRETATION, ODUBER, MAINLY WITH LOPEZ' SUPPORT, APPARENTLY WAS DESIGNATED TO MAKE THE JOURNEY.

2. WHILE I WAS BUSY STRESSING THE POINTS MADE IN REFTTEL, GOP WASHINGTON AMBASSADOR LEWIS CALLED FROM PANAMA AND,
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ACCORDING TO ODUBER, SAID THAT HE HAD LOCATED TORRIJOS "WALKING IN THE MOUNTAINS", AND THAT HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO SEE ODUBER. ODUBER WILL MAKE THE TRIP MARCH 21 P.M. AND RETURN QUICKLY AND DIRECTLY TO HIS RANCH. ODUBER DESCRIBED LEWIS AS HAVING BEEN "GOLPEADO" BY THE DECONCINI RESERVATION.

3. ODUBER PERSONALLY APPEARS READY TO ACCEPT THE MEANING OF THE DECONCINI RESERVATION AS EXPLAINED IN PARAS 8 AND 9 OF REFTEL. HE WAS HOPEFUL FOR A COPY OF THE EXACT TEXT PROVIDED HIM "SO THAT HE COULD BE PREPARED TO EXPLAIN TO TORRIJOS EXACTLY WHAT HE INTERPRETED IT TO REPRESENT"

4. ODUBER INDICATED THAT IN ANY CASE HE HAD AND WILL CONTINUE TO COUNSEL TORRIJOS TO THINK (A) IN TERMS OF WHAT THE TREATIES, IF BOTH ARE RATIFIED, DO FOR THE PROBLEMS PANAMA FACES TODAY, AND (B) THAT ANY CHANGES OPERATIVE AFTER THE YEAR 2,000 WILL AFFECT IN THE MAIN ANOTHER GENERATION OF PANAMANIAN. I SUGGESTED THAT HE ALSO CALL ATTENTION TO THE IMMENSE EFFORT UNDERTAKEN BY THE ADMINISTRATION AND SENATE LEADERS TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT OCCURRED ON THURSDAY, AND THE VITAL ROLE PLAYED IN THIS SUCCESS BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S FULL COMMITMENT OF HIS OFFICE AND PRESTIGE BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHES TO THE ENTIRE HEMISPHERIC RELATIONSHIP.
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